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SUBJECT: THE VOLUNTARY PRINCIPLES PROCESS IN COLOMBIA

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[1B](#). 04 BOGOTA 3373

[1C](#). 04 BOGOTA 10071

[11](#). Summary. On March 29, Vice President Santos hosted a meeting on the Voluntary Principles (VPs) process in Colombia. Present at the meeting were the Ambassador, members of the National Committee on Voluntary Principles, and representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Presidencia, and the Netherlands Embassy. Items discussed were the 2005 VPs work-plan, NGO involvement, and the creation of a technical team. End Summary.

Background

[12](#). As stated in reftels, the GOC has embraced the VPs framework and developed a work-plan, which focuses on three areas: a risk assessment, relations between hydrocarbon companies and public security forces, and relations between hydrocarbon companies and private security forces. In addition, a National Committee on Voluntary Principles was formed to advance the VPs process in Colombia. The committee currently consists of representatives from the Vice President's office, the embassies of the U.S. and the U.K., the Colombian Association of Petroleum Producers (ACP), ChevronTexaco, Occidental and British Petroleum (BP). The committee expects to incorporate a representative from the Netherlands Embassy, the Inspector General's Office, the Ministry of Defense, Ecopetrol and other hydrocarbon companies, and a few NGO's. The Ambassador made it a point to attend the meeting personally to emphasize the importance we place on this program in Colombia.

Highlights of the Meeting

[13](#). ACP began the meeting with a presentation outlining the importance of the VPs, a review of the VPs process in Colombia, and the work-plan for 2005. To date, the National Committee has developed a draft risk assessment, which was formulated after 11 regional workshops with the Armed Forces, the Justice Department, the Inspector General's office, the Department of Security, the Ministry of Mines and Energy, Interior, and Defense, as well as more than 40 companies in the energy sector. Best practices meetings were also held to develop the risk assessment. On the margins, econoff spoke to committee members regarding factoring in equipment transfers and human rights records to the risk assessment process (responses were favorable).

[14](#). ACP outlined actions already taken concerning relations between hydrocarbon companies and private security forces. Over the last year, ACP held workshops to discuss best practices among the hydrocarbon companies in Colombia. From these workshops, companies developed internal guidelines to promote linkages between the protection of human rights and security. In some cases, these guidelines are articulated in the contracts signed between the hydrocarbon firms and private security companies.

[15](#). The 2005 work-plan focuses on the three major aspects of the VPs as well as strengthening democratic institutions. Looking forward, the risk assessment will consist of an exchange of information and analysis from the National Committee members and a promotion of best practices. Relations with public security forces will focus on promoting human rights and the VPs among the Armed Forces, identifying procedures within the committee to call attention to human rights violations in the field, and increasing transparency of the VPs process. Relations with private security forces will focus on promoting the VPs and human rights among the private security firms and sharing best practices among the hydrocarbon companies. Strengthening democratic institutions is a new, but important aspect in promoting the voluntary principles. Under this theme, the committee is looking to promote more Casas de Justicia in towns near extractive industries to increase access to government services for the local community. The Casa de Justicia in Yopal is a USAID/BP funded project, which continues to be funded by BP.

NGO Involvement

16. During the meeting, Vice President Santos asked about NGO involvement and requested the committee to focus on including NGOs in the VPs process. ACP plans to meet with International Alert in early April to discuss the VPs process and solicit their support. Other potential NGOs are the International Crisis Group and Transparency International.

Technical Team

17. At the conclusion of the meeting, Vice President Santos agreed to the formation of a technical team, which will meet monthly to discuss the VPs process and hold additional best practices meetings. The technical team will be made up of representatives from the National Committee and other VPs stakeholders. In an effort to show leadership of the VPs process, Vice President Santos instructed Carlos Franco, director for the presidential program for human rights, to lead the technical team.

18. During the meeting, Vice President Santos seemed focused on the image of the VPs program, to which the Ambassador commented that the image is only a byproduct of the process and not the goal. He added that the National Committee needs to focus on concrete steps, such as publishing the work-plan on the web. Santos reacted favorably and directed ACP to put it on the internet.

WOOD